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UNCLAS PARAMARIBO 000126

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E.O. 12958: DECL: N/A

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SUBJECT: LOCAL PUNDIT'S CRITICISM OF FTAA GETS BIG MEDIA
ATTENTION IN SURINAME

REF: 03 PARAMARIBO 796

1. SUMMARY: A JANUARY 19 EDITORIAL BY LOCAL PUNDIT NICO WAAGMEESTER CRITICIZED THE FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS (FTAA) PROCESS FOR STRAYING FROM THE ORIGINAL IDEALS OF DEVELOPMENT, DEMOCRACY, FREE TRADE, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. WAAGMEESTER, A MEMBER OF THE CONSERVATIVE EMPLOYERS' UNION (VSB), LAMENTED THE SHIFT FROM A FOCUS ON POVERTY REDUCTION TO ONE OF MARKET ACCESS. DESPITE PRESIDENT RONALD VENETIAAN'S ATTEMPT TO GARNER SUPPORT FOR FTAA IN HIS NOVEMBER 25 INDEPENDENCE SPEECH IN WHICH HE CALLED ON SURINAMERS TO SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT THE FTAA AND THE CARIBBEAN SINGLE MARKET ECONOMY (CSME) PRESENT, ANTI-FTAA RHETORIC CONTINUES TO GET GREAT PLAY IN THE LOCAL MEDIA. (SEE REFTEL.) END SUMMARY.

FTAA NO LONGER FOCUSED ON POVERTY REDUCTION
OR DEVELOPMENT, SAYS LOCAL PUNDIT

2. IN A JANUARY 19 EDITION OF LOCAL DAILY DE WARE TIJD, NICO WAAGMEESTER, A MEMBER OF THE CONSERVATIVE EMPLOYERS' UNION (VSB), PUBLISHED AN EDITORIAL CRITICAL OF THE FREE TRADE OF AREA OF THE AMERICAS (FTAA) NEGOTIATIONS PROCESS AND ITS "VISION." EXTENSIVELY CITING SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE CARICOM BYRON BLAKE AT THE NOVEMBER 8-10, 2003, CARIBBEAN CENTRAL AMERICAN ACTION (CCAA) HELD IN MIAMI, WAAGMEESTER PAINTED THE FTAA NEGOTIATION'S PROCESS AS ONE THAT HAD BEEN HIJACKED FROM ITS 1993 VISION FOCUSED ON PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT, DEMOCRACY, FREE TRADE, AND ENVIRONMENT TO ONE THAT FOCUSED ON COOPERATION FOR THE BENEFIT OF A FEW COUNTRIES. THE 2003 VISION, HE SAID, HAS BECOME A UNION IN WHICH RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS ARE BASED ON THE INTERESTS OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBER STATES, MARKET ACCESS, AND MONEY LAUNDERING. THE FINAL AGREEMENT, WAAGMEESTER WROTE, WILL BE FORGED DESPITE THE ABILITY OF INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES TO NEGOTIATE ON AN EVEN FOOTING WITH LARGER COUNTRIES AND REGARDLESS OF WHETHER MEMBER STATES CAN FULFILL ITS OBLIGATIONS. WITH SMALL ECONOMIES, LIKE SURINAME'S, NOT READY TO OPEN THEIR MARKETS TO STIFF FOREIGN COMPETITION, FTAA'S WINNERS WILL BE BIG ECONOMIES, WAAGMEESTER CONCLUDED, AT THE EXPENSE OF SMALL, UNDERDEVELOPED ECONOMIES.

COMMENT

3. IN HIS NOVEMBER 25, 2003, INDEPENDENCE-DAY SPEECH, PRESIDENT RONALD VENETIAAN PRONOUNCED HIS SUPPORT FOR FTAA AND CALLED ON SURINAMERS TO SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED BY FTAA AND THE CARIBBEAN SINGLE MARKET ECONOMY (CSME). LOCAL PUNDITS LIKE WAAGMEESTER, HOWEVER, CONTINUE TO GET GREAT PRESS COVERAGE FOR ANTI-FTAA RHETORIC, REFLECTING THE GENERAL ANXIETY AMONG SURINAMERS OVER HOW THEY WILL FARE WHEN FTAA IS IMPLEMENTED. (SEE REFTEL.) SURINAMERS CONTINUE TO EXPRESS THE FEAR THAT SURINAMESE BUSINESSES WILL BE WIPED OUT BY AGGRESSIVE FOREIGN COMPETITION -- AND FOR GOOD REASONS. MANY SURINAMESE BUSINESSES LACK BASIC SKILLS TO COMPETE GLOBALLY, SUCH AS MARKETING SAVVY, MANAGERIAL SKILLS, OR KNOWLEDGE OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS. AS LONG AS SURINAMERS SEE LITTLE GAIN FROM FTAA, WAAGMEESTER'S VIEW WILL PERSIST THAT FTAA'S WINNERS WILL BE LARGE ECONOMIES AT THE EXPENSE OF SMALL ECONOMIES. END COMMENT.

BARNES

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2004PARAMA00126 - Classification: UNCLASSIFIED

v1.6.3